Partial Text of Haig's Statement for Senators in Confirmation Hearing

Partial text of statement of Alexander Haig Jr. for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Jan. 9, 1981.

Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to appear before this distinguished committee. . . .

We have in this century been often called to shed our blood for the nations of the free world, and in an ingenious and generous plan designed by a great army general and secretary of state, George C. Marshall, we helped, after the most devastating war in history, rebuild Europe and strengthening civilization.

Our record in this century is not perfect, but it should be a source of great pride. Our successes were founded on a firm commitment to our ideals combined with a sense of the realities of human nature and international politics. . . .

The earlier the Reagan administration articulates its approach to these issues, the better served the nations of the world and the people of our own nation will be. . . .

. . I have spent 35 of the last 37 years in public service. . . . Nevertheless, my nomination has stimulated renewed interest among some in a few events during that service — events that occurred during the four years that I served on the Staff of the National Security Council from January 1969 to January 1973 and during the time that I served as chief of staff in the White House from May 1973 to September 1974.

Most of these events have been thoroughly investigated in general, and my role in particular has been scrutinized meticulously. I have testified at length under oath eight times concerning my role in many of these incidents. . . .

None of these investigations have found any culpability on my part.

In an appendix to this statement, I have set forth the facts on certain events in which Senator (Claiborne) Pell (D-R.I.) has expressed an interest. . . . I would, however, like to underscore how I viewed Watergate while I was White House chief of staff.

● I believed that President Nixon . . . was entitled to the presumption of innocence, until proven otherwise. . . . In that context, I worked hard within the boundaries of the law and the advice of the lawyers to support him.

● I also believe passionately in the office of the presidency and the awesome ability of that office to inspire its occupants to consider constantly the judgment of history and to work for the broad public interest. . . . I viewed my overriding duty as one to preserve that office in the national interest. . . .

● Although Watergate was obviously important during my tenure as chief of staff, I spent 90 percent of my time trying to assure that the other business of the presidency was properly conducted. . . .

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me move to the present and the future. . . . there is now widespread agreement that the years immediately ahead will be unusually dangerous. Evidence of that danger is everywhere"

● In Europe, still the fulcrum of the East-West balance, Soviet military power once again casts an ominous shadow over the efforts of an East European people to assert fundamental freedoms of association and expression.

● In the Middle East, an uneasy peace continues to be punctuated by raid and reprisal, with each such sequence threatening renewed and wider conflict.

● At the head of the Persian Gulf, war between Iran and Iraq threatens the very lifeblood of many national economies. Iran itself, once a major force for regional stability, lurches from demonstration to demonstration in a state of near anarchy. Meanwhile, not far to the East, 85,000 Soviet troops brutalize Afghanistan in the first major post-World War II employment of Soviet troops outside the area the Soviets have heretofore considered their sphere of influence.

● In Asia, sworn enemies face one another along a 5000-mile arc from Thailand to the Manchurian frontier. On the Korean Peninsula, only a fragile truce persists nearly 30 years after the formal cessation of Korean hostilities.

● In Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, turmoil and violence stunt national development, and invite terrorism from within and adventurism from without, as millions of human beings starve and thousands of new refugees seek shelter each day.

It is no wonder the 1980s have been called a decade of crisis. Yet, it is precisely that sort of appraisal which I believe we must reject. The very term "crisis" implies that events are out of control, and that our nation can only react. . . . The task of statesmanship is to master these problems, and thus minimize the necessity for ricocheting from crisis to crisis.

Today we face a world in which power in a variety of forms has become diffused among over 150 nations. Adjustment of relations with and among so many separate governments would be difficult enough, even were all equally responsible and equally committed to stability and peace. But many are willing to foment instability and violence to achieve their objectives. That reality alone should argue for better coordination of policies among the free nations. . . .

Our collective vulnerability to international unrest is matched by a socio-economic challenge that we all share. The growing interdependence of our economies, and our continued reliance on foreign sources of energy and raw materials, have stripped the West of the independent and collective resilience which once allowed one nation's economic strength to bolster another's momentary weakness. . . .

Much of the fragmentation of power has occurred in the so-called "Third World" — a misleading term if ever there was one. If one thing has become abundantly clear in the last decade or so, it is that the commonality of condition, purpose — and by extension, U.S. foreign policy — implied by the term "Third World" is a myth, and a dangerous one at that.

Recent American foreign policy has suffered from the misperception which lumps together nations as diverse as Brazil and Libya, Indonesia and South Yemen, Cuba and Kuwait; and which has too frequently produced attempts to cut the national pattern to fit the foreign policy cloth. This failure to tailor policy to the individual circumstances of developing nations has frequently aggravated the very internal stresses which Western policy should seek instead to diminish. Our difficulties in this regard have hardly been lessened by our propensity to apply to these emerging states Western standards which resolutely ignore vast differences in their cultural, political development, economic vitality, and internal and external security.

These fundamental problems — the diffusion of power, the interdependence of the allied community, and the failure to recognize the variety among the so-called Third World Nations — are made the more intractable by what is perhaps the central strategic phenomenon of the Post-World War II era: the transformation of Soviet military power from a continental and largely defensive land army to a global offensive Army, Navy and Air Force fully capable of supporting an imperial foreign policy. Considered in conjunction with the episodic nature of the West's military response, this tremendous accumulation of armed might has produced perhaps the most complete reversal of global power relationships ever seen in a period of relative peace. Today, the threat of Soviet military intervention colors attempts to achieve international civility. Unchecked, the growth of Soviet military power must eventually paralyze Western policy altogether.

These, then, are fundamental problems which challenge American foreign policy, and the future of the democracies generally. To say that is not to diminish the importance of other Western goals: the eradication of hunger, poverty and disease; the expansion of the free flow of people, goods and ideas; the spread of social justice; and through these and similar efforts, the improvement of the human condition. . . .

The United States has a clear choice. We can continue, if we wish, to react to events as they occur — serially, unselectively, and increasingly in the final analysis, unilaterally. One lesson of Afghanistan is certainly that few symptomatic crises are capable of effectively rallying the collective energies of the free world. We may wish it were otherwise, but wishing will not make it so.

United Press International

Alexander Haig, Ronald Reagan's secretary of state designee.

Alternatively, we can confront the fundamental issues I have discussed. We can seek actively to shape events and, in the process, attempt to forge consensus among like-minded peoples. Such a consensus will enable us to deal with the more fundamentals tasks I have outlined: the management of Soviet power; the reestablishment of an orderly international economic climate; the economic and political maturation of developing nations to the benefit of their peoples; and the achievement of a reasonable standard of international civility. Acting alone, each of these tasks is beyond even our power; acting together, all are within the capacity of free nations. . . .

If we are to succeed in this effort, the conduct of American foreign policy must be characterized above all by three qualities:

First, we must act with consistency. Specific issues may furnish the occasion for action, but they cannot constitute the sole basis for policy. Once we accept that the specific issues facing us today are merely surface manifestations of more fundamental problems, it must also be clear that effective policy cannot be created anew daily, informed solely by our immediate need. To do so risks misperception by our adversaries, loss of confidence by our allies, and confusion among our own people. U.S. policy has been most effective — in Europe and the Middle East, for example — where consistent U.S. interests have been consistently pursued.

Second, we must behave reliably. American power and prestige should not be lightly committed; but once made, a commitment must be honored. Our friends cannot be expected to share in the burdens and risks of collective action if they cannot count on the word of the United States. Our adversaries cannot be expected to exercise prudence if they perceive our resolve to be hostage to the exigencies of the moment. Those whose posture toward us remains to be determined cannot be expected to decide in favor of friendship if they cannot confidently assess the benefits of association with us. . . .

Finally, and in some ways most important, American foreign policy must demonstrate balance, both in our approach to individual issues, and in the orchestration of policy generally. By balance, I mean recognizing that complex issues invariably require us to weigh, and somehow reconcile, a variety of pressures, often competing. Thus, for example:

● I believe that equitable and verifiable arms control contributes to security. But restraint in the growth and proliferation of armaments will not be achieved by policies which increase the very insecurities that promote arms competition;

● Domestic economic stability will not be enhanced by the establishment of short-sighted, economic barriers which undermine the multilateral cooperation essential to the prosperity of all.

● The assurance of basic human liberties will not be improved by replacing friendly governments which incompletely satisfy our standards of democracy with hostile ones which are even less benign.

● And our commitment to peace will not be furthered by abdicating the right to exercise military power to only the most ruthless members of the international community.

Balance must also be struck in the orchestration of policy generally: In our selection of the issues we choose to address; in the priority we accord them; and understanding the relationship of individual issues, one to another, and each to our broad policy objectives. This form of balance has become known as linkage, and the president-elect has publicly stated his commitment to it. . . .

Consistently, reliability, balance. These three attributes are essential, not because they guarantee a successful foreign policy — nothing can do that — but because their absence guarantees an unsuccessful one. Unfortunately, as De Tocqueville pointed out long ago, these are precisely the qualities which a democracy finds most difficult to muster. This inherent difficulty has been complicated in the past decade by the breakdown of foreign policy bipartisanship; and by the development of unnecessary division between Congress and the Executive Branch, and among the executive departments themselves.

Our urgent task is to reestablish an effective foreign policy consensus. To do so, I believe three conditions must be met:

● First, the constitutional and traditional responsibility of the president for the conduct of foreign affairs must be reaffirmed. The United States government must speak to other nations with a single voice. To say that is in no sense to argue for curtailing discussion or debate. On the contrary, I believe both are essential. But the authoritative voice must be the president's.

The president needs a single individual to serve as the general manager of American diplomacy. President-elect Reagan believes that the secretary of state should play this role. As secretary of state, I would function as a member of the president's team, but one with clear responsibility for formulating and conducting foreign policy, and for explaining it to the Congress, the public, and the world at large. The assistant to the president for national security would fill a staff role for the president.

● Second, an effective partnership must be restored with the Congress. By partnership, I do not mean occasional retrospective reporting. I mean active consultation, exchange of ideas and proposals in a timely manner, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and confidence, recognizing the special role of the Senate. . . . In turn, Congress must do its part. In a partnership, both sides must behave responsibly.

● Finally, the most consistent articulation of policy is wasted if the professionals who must execute it are divorced from its formulation, and if their experience and skill are usurped in the name of confidentiality, haste, or political sensitivity. The career personnel of the State Department and the Foreign Service are an unmatched intellectual resource, and they will be around long after the president and the secretary of state are gone. . . .

In closing, let me speak to our resources, which are considerable.

Although we have economic problems, we still possess the largest and strongest economy on earth. It is within our power to revitalize our productive base; maintain and expand our agricultural strength; regain commercial competitiveness; and reduce our dependency on foreign sources of energy and other raw materials. No American foreign policy can succeed from a base of economic weakness.

Our alliances enable us to draw on the strengths and the wisdom of some of the world's greatest nations. Yet our alliances must be tended, and adapted to new problems not visualized by their creators. In the process, we must bear in mind that the essence of any alliance is its core of shared commitment and endeavor. In the 1980s, we should not let ourselves become preoccupied with debates over who is doing more; the challenges we face will require more from all of us.

We possess a full range of the instruments of effective statecraft: A diplomatic corps second to none; economic and military assistance programs; a variety of sophisticated cultural and informational resources; and, of course, military power which no potential adversary can afford to ignore. These instruments provide the United States with unrivaled capacity to influence the course of international events. Their maintenance or neglect will declare Amerian intentions far more clearly than any rhetoric.

But I believe our greatest strength is the strength of our values and political institutions. These have been tested in recent years. But they have survived. As we survey the world, reflect on its problems and recognize its dangers, we must accept the fact that, like it or not, we are a nation of trustees: Trustees for the values of freedom and justice that have inspired mankind for thousands of years.

The secretary of state of the United States has a responsibility second only to that of the president himself, to ensure that this trusteeship is managed wisely and well. I approach this responsibility in full recognition of the gravity of our task, with confidence that we will succeed, and with the knowledge that working closely with this committee and the Congress is a key to our success.

'I Will Describe Briefly My Activities During 1969-74 . . .'

Excerpts from appendix to Haig statement:

To assist the Committee's review, I will describe briefly my activities during 1969-74. . . .

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (1969-1973)

During those four years, I served first as one of two executive assistants to Dr. Henry Kissinger, the assistant to the president for national security affairs, and then beginning in June 1971, as deputy assistant to the president for national security affairs.

In both positions I was responsible for reviewing materials before they reached Dr. Kissinger's desk, being familiar with the matters that he was working on, transmitting information to him, obtaining decisions from him, and seeing that those decisions were carried out. . . .

I also had specific responsibilities to work closely with Dr. Kissinger in his negotiations with the North Vietnamese seeking and end to the war in Vietnam and the return of U.S. prisoners of war, and to coordinate the extensive preparations for President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. . . .

The three areas in which my role has been most intensely examined during my NSC days illustrate how different my participation could be. In two of these areas — the FBI wiretaps and the Chilean covert activity — my involvement was quite limited. In the third — U.S. policy in Southeast Asia — I had a much more substantial role.

With respect to wiretaps, during 1969 and 1970, the FBI conducted wiretaps and other surveillance on a number of individuals, primarily government officials and newsmen. President Nixon instituted this program in the spring of 1969 because of his concern about leaks of national security information, including disclosure of minutes of National Security Council meetings and of U.S. bargaining options in upcoming SALT negotiations.

The facts about my role are straightforward:

● The decision to use wiretaps and surveillance to detect the source of the leaks was made by the president, in consultation with the attorney general of the United States, and the director of the FBI. I was not involved.

● I was assured that the program was legal.

● I never decided which individuals were to be tapped. On several occasions, I was asked by Dr. Kissinger to identify individuals who had access to specific information, and I identified those who, to my knowledge, had such access. My responsibility was to convey to the FBI names of individuals that were provided to me either by the president or by Dr. Kissinger. On many occasions, the summaries of the results of the tapes were delivered to me for Dr. Kissinger. . . .

I am aware that the legal rules governing wiretaps today differ dramatically from the rules in effect in 1970. . . . As secretary of state, I will, of course, follow the law just as I sought to do when I served in the White House 10 years ago.

Now, with respect to covert activities in Chile. . . . In general, throughout my service on the National Security Council staff, I had no responsibility to review or approve any CIA covert activities in Chile.

I am aware that the Congress has established procedures for informing the Senate Intelligence Committee "of all intelligence activites . . . including any significant anticipated intelligence activity. . . . " The Reagan administration intends to follow those procedures.

U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia

1. Bombing of North Vietnamese Sanctuaries on the Cambodian Border.

President Nixon's decision to bomb the sanctuaries of North Vietnamese troops along the Cambodian border and to keep that bombing secret was made in March 1969. I supported the president's decision to order those raids, and I was involved in planning them. The bombing was focused on North Vietnamese troop encampments, within five miles of the Vietnamese-Cambodian border where there was virtually no civilian population. This operation was carried out as a secret military mission. I was aware that congressional leaders were notified about it at the time although I had no personal responsibility for that process. I was not aware of any subsequent inaccurate statement that may have been provided to the Congress.

2. Increased bombing of North Vietnam in December, 1972

During my four years at the National Security Council, the negotiations to end the Vietnam War gradually occupied more and more of my time — particularly after I became Dr. Kissinger's deputy in June 1971. I worked closely with Dr. Kissinger as negotiations intensified in late 1972 seeking to end the war and obtain the return of U.S. prisoners of war.

During this period, the North Vietnamese began to renounce earlier agreements and stall the negotiations for peace. As a result, Dr. Kissinger and I advocated the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam which occurred in late December 1972. I believed then that it was the only way to convince the North Vietnamese to resume serious negotiation. (I continue to believe today that judgment was correct.) Subsequent observers — as well as aerial reconnaissance photos — have confirmed that the bombing was focused on selective military targets and did not result in indiscriminate "carpet bombing" of civilian areas.

. . . The North Vietnamese quickly signaled their willingness to return to the negotiations. Those negotiations did resume in January 1973, and led to the agreement that President Nixon announced on Jan. 23, 1973, and led to the return of U.S. prisoners of war in the spring of 1973.

WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF (1973-74)

. . . When I arrived at the White House in May 1973, there were almost a hundred major positions empty — Cabinet positions, heads of agencies, sub-Cabinet positions, White House staff positions. My initial task was to reorganize the White House staff and to move promptly to fill vacant positions; in addition, I was responsible for managing the president's appointments, schedules, and meetings, and for reviewing papers before they went to the president.

In what follows, I will try to reconstruct my actions in several separate areas. Some involve incidents that occurred very shortly after I arrived at the White House. I was unfamiliar in the details of Watergate. Other pressures and duties demanded my attention with far greater urgency. By the time other events occurred, my involvement in post-Watergate related matters had grown substantially.

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. . . As I testified, this issue also came to my attention shortly after I arrived at the White House. I took only one action of any significance: At the request of the President, I obtained the name of an attorney from White House counsel Leonard Garment, and transmitted the name of that attorney to Mr. (C.G. "Bebe") Rebozo as a lawyer that he might retain in connection with an IRS investigation. . . .

The Nixon Tapes

1) Transcription of Tapes

The responsibility for supervising the preparation of all transcripts that were to be released either to the courts, congressional committees or to the public rested completely in the hands of the White House legal staff, working with President Nixon.

I never personally listened to a tape (other than a brief portion of one that President Nixon played at a Cabinet meeting to demonstrate the poor quality of the recordings). I never participated in reviewing any transcript for accuracy or in deciding the relevancy to Watergate of portions of conversations. Those decisions were left to the lawyers and other members of the White House staff subject to review by President Nixon.

My knowledge and views the contents of tapes came from either the White House legal staff or President Nixon himself. . . .

2) The 18½-Minute Gap

I never physically had any tape in my possession, and I explained in two days of testimony before Judge Sirica my limited and arms-length actions in arranging on several occasions for President Nixon or his secretary to listen to tapes. I still have no knowlege of the origin of the 18½-minute gap.

3) Transcript of June 4, 1973, Meeting with President Nixon

The transcript of a meeting between President Nixon and me on June 4, 1973, has been the repeated subject of speculation and innuendo.

This meeting occurred in the context of the president's decision to listen to his tapes at my urging based on the advice of the White House lawyers. I had been at the White House for less than a month and I knew little about the details of Watergate.

At this date I cannot reconstruct the precise June 4 conversation even with the transcript in front of me. But I do recall that I wanted President Nixon to finish listening to the tapes — to complete a task that he did not find pleasant.

To turn specifically to the transcript: it shows the president saying to me that he will continue to review the tapes to "see what else is in" them. I agreed with him that he should continue to review the tapes, saying, "That's the thing for you to do, for your own, really your own peace of mind right now." And I continue: "You can't recall. It was a meeting . . . [unintelligible]."

In context I believe that I was emphasizing to him that he should — for his own sake — continue to listen to the tapes since he could not recall independently what had been said.

But, since the transcript shows so many parts of the conversation as unintelligible, it is impossible to say with certainty exactly what we were discussing in those two sentences. I do not have an independent recollection now of those sentences. But one thing I know with complete certainty is that I never suggested then or on any other occasion, that he should dissemble or pretend not to recall something.

The Nixon Pardon

In October 1974, President Ford testified before the House Judiciary Committee about the circumstances surrounding his decision to pardon President Nixon. That testimony accords with my recollection of my conversations with Mr. Ford. But let me remove any lingering doubt. At no time did I ever suggest in any way an agreement or "deal" that Mr. Nixon would resign in exchange for a pardon from Mr. Ford.

When I met alone with Vice President Ford on August 1, 1974, I went to that meeting to tell him of President Nixon's inclination to resign, and to emphasize to him that he had to be prepared to assume the presidency within a very short time. . . . As President Ford indicated in his testimony, the courses of action under discussion by the White House lawyers included: letting impeachment take its course through the House and a Senate trial, prompt resignation, temporary withdrawal from office under the Twenty-Fifth Amendment, a censure vote in lieu of impeachment, President Nixon pardoning himself, and a pardon from President Ford. As President Ford also testified, I did not advocate any course of action. . . .